



Shaping Our Children's School Success

Middletown School Readiness Council

Testimony Presented to the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly March 10, 2008

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Education Committee:

The Middletown School Readiness Council sincerely appreciates your leadership and interest in the Connecticut School Readiness Initiative and the critical role that you play in its success. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on ***Bill No. 5026, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Regarding Education***, in particular, the proposed \$1.8 million cut to the School Readiness program. We were so delighted last year when the governor unveiled her budget and supported a long awaited expansion of the Connecticut School Readiness program. For the first time, we were able to work with our local programs to develop local expansion plans based on the governor's support of the School Readiness initiative. We added 37 new School Readiness spaces in Middletown this year and are poised to add an additional 67 spaces in 2009. We have worked diligently with local providers to develop these new classrooms that we plan to open in July 2008. For the first time, we have been able to point to the governor's proposed budget as a solid indication of the state's commitment that expansion funds will be available. Cutting the School Readiness line item is breaking a promise to local communities who have counted on these funds to confidently move expansion plans forward. It would be a travesty to go back on the governor's earlier commitment to expand and it will make it even more difficult for local coordinators to work with providers to develop additional space in the future.

Also of concern is the proposed establishment of a rate increase for the second half of this year and next, based on the estimated unspent funds from each year. While the intent to establish a rate increase is appreciated and supported, this method for determining an increase will result in little or no additional revenue to programs. More disturbing, it will deter programs from being able to accurately plan their annual program budget. An annual rate increase that can be counted on and planned for is critically needed.

Middletown School Readiness providers report markedly increased costs to run a high quality program:

- public school and community college programs have dictated annual salary increases with no additional School Readiness money to support those increases
- oil costs are increasing at alarming rates and eating into program budgets
- the new N.A.E.Y.C. standards require that programs serve more nutritious food and drinks which also have higher costs

Middletown programs have been forced to curtail enrichment activities and field trips, reduce the amount they spend on classroom materials, and forego salary increases to staff. The serious problem of ongoing increases in program expenses without an accompanying increase in program revenue must be addressed if we are to truly operate high quality programs and for the School Readiness initiative to stay alive. We urge you to establish an annual rate increase for School Readiness reimbursement rates.

We thank you for this opportunity to comment on Bill 5026. We know that your commitment to School Readiness and all early care and education programs is strong. And, we are confident that you will continue to be champions for Connecticut's youngest children by both shaping legislation that supports high quality early education programs and advocating for state investment in their learning. We sincerely appreciate your fine leadership.

The Middletown School Readiness Council

Sebastian Giuliano, Mayor
Dr. Michael J. Frechette, Superintendent of Schools
Betsy Morgan, Council Chair, Middlesex Coalition for Children
Terri Ayala, Parent and Literacy Coordinator
Ed Bonilla, Middlesex United Way
Wendy Berlind, Middletown Cooperative Nursery School
William Boyd, Board of Education
Cindy Cappetta, Director, Even Start Program
Jewel Christy, St. Francis Church
Sheila Daniels, Family Day Care Provider, Board of Education, Parent
Julie Deak, Community Health Center
Lisa Ellis, Director, CRT Head Start Program
Alice Ellovich, Dept. of Social Services
Christine Fahey, School Readiness Coordinator
Dr. Stephen Gaarder, Parent
James Gaudreau, Principal, Wilbert Snow School
Tina Gomes, Special Projects, Manager & Budget Analyst to the Mayor
Dr. John Hennelly, Assistant Superintendent of Schools
Renata Lantos, Principal, Bielefield School
Dr. Jerome Long, Grandparent
Megan Lubert, Coordinator, Child and Family Agency Early Head Start Program
Susan Macary, Family Advocacy Program, Middlesex Hospital
Donna Marino, Parent Resource Coordinator
Dr. Cliff O'Callahan, Pediatrician, Middlesex Family Practice/Family Residency
Christine O'Grady, P.L.T.I. Coordinator, Parent
Maureen Partyka, Director, Family Resource Centers
Alvenis Reddick, AME Cross Street Zion Church
Kitty Robinson, Children's Department Head, Russell Library
Dr. Robert Rosenbaum, Chair, PIMMS, Wesleyan University
Alice Torres, Area Cooperative Education Services